



# HOW COMMUNICATING WITH THE RIGHT CHANNELS, MESSAGE, AND TIMING GETS CLIENTS THROUGH THE DOOR IN 2020'S UNIQUE TAX SEASON





The 2020 tax season will be an historic one. In accordance with the president's emergency declaration and in conjunction with the Stafford Act of 1988, the Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service announced that the federal income tax filing due date is automatically extended from April 15 to July 15. COVID-19 has extended tax season.

#### **What does this deadline change mean for accounting firms?**

Obviously, there are multiple repercussions for accountants across the country. They will be spending more time doing some of their most strenuous and vital work. However, this extension also gives accounting firms the opportunity to build their clientele base by attracting new customers.

Weave recently commissioned an independent study that surveyed a random sample of 828 taxpayers. It reveals some interesting statistics about how

accounting firms can keep their existing clients happy, find new customers, and schedule them early to beat the tax season rush.

This e-book discusses how your marketing strategy can learn from these statistics. Choosing the right channels, messages, and timing is crucial for accounting firms looking to broaden their influence in conjunction with the IRS's new deadline.

After analyzing this data, we will consider the ways in which the right communication system can get clients through the door of your accounting firm before July 15, in spite of the constraints presented by the COVID-19 crisis.

## **The Right Channels, Messages, and Timing**

### **CHANNELS**

The unique 2020 tax season gives accounting firms the opportunity to contact clients that might have procrastinated setting up an appointment with an accountant. It also provides the chance to reach people that might have otherwise avoided talking to an accounting firm altogether.

What channels of communication should accounting firms use to contact current, former, and potential customers? The independent survey we commissioned shows a few different ways to reach this group before the new deadline for filing taxes.

First, the statistics show that 42% of taxpayers would like to receive communication from an accountant before tax season to help them prepare. This number suggests that your accounting firm should be using communication channels right now to prepare taxpayers for the new deadline. Some of them may not even know about the recent deadline extension!

Contacting customers outside of official tax season builds trust and demonstrates your firm's expertise; experienced accountants understand that filing taxes is a process that takes time and careful preparation.

Next, 52% of taxpayers indicated that they prefer to get tax tips from accounting firms by email. This statistic suggests that, as part of preparing clients for tax season, accounting firms should be creating a list of tax tips to distribute to their clientele by email.

While brainstorming and developing this list may seem like a nuisance in the short term, providing customers with a framework for gathering information and materials to file taxes can potentially save on time spent by you and your staff. When clients are prepared to file their taxes, your appointments with them go much smoother and quicker.

Finally, when it comes to tax tips, taxpayers want to hear from their accounting firm through fairly conventional channels: email, in person, and by post.

These preferences confirm the need to develop a quality list of tax preparation tips to be distributed in the form of email and postcards. Additionally, if your office has the means, hosting workshops or one-

on-one sit downs with clients in advance of the July 15 deadline is favored over other channels.

The taxpayers surveyed in our study expressed a lack of interest in getting tax tips through social media, video conferences, or website posts. These various media are effective in other ways, but aren't immediately useful for educating customers.

## MESSAGE

Now that we've established the best channels for contacting customers with tax tips, let's see what taxpayers had to say about the message they want accounting firms to send them.

The types of tax tips customers hope to hear are generally things that apply to all taxpayers. They are interested in the finer points of hidden deductions, health insurance, and other investments that could lower the amount they pay in taxes. Promotional and educational emails, in-person meetings, and mailers distributed by your firm should incorporate these themes.

Taxpayers are less interested in more specific tips, like those concerning divorce, starting a business, or running a rental property. Keep in mind, it's not that these particular tax questions are unimportant to all clients. It's that messaging for these areas is best approached on a case by

case basis rather than as a broad marketing campaign.

Beyond tax tips, there are certain considerations that drive customers to engage with a new accountant instead of DIY software. Taxpayers are enticed by

accounting firms that offer an accuracy guarantee, low prices, and auditing protection. Again, notice the universal nature of these offers; they can apply to anyone filing their taxes.

Offers that don't get the attention of taxpayers include invitations to meet via video conferencing, guarantees of a long appointment (over two hours), and bundling tax and legal services. These findings might seem intuitive to some accounting firms, but we want to be clear. Some offers just don't work.

Part of developing a successful marketing message is identifying where marginal gains can be made in reaching a wider audience. We've established that taxpayers are interested in messages centered around offers of auditing protection, low prices, and accuracy guarantees.

More specifically, our survey found that 27% of taxpayers would respond to an offer of auditing protection by an accounting firm. 35% of that same group would respond to a low price guarantee, and 23% would respond to a discount for early appointments.

Understanding which messages are attractive to consumers is key to getting clients through your firm's door in 2020. The statistics we uncovered say that sticking to

the basics, like offering audit protection, low prices, and an accuracy guarantee, generates more attention from customers and potential clients than more nuanced offers.

## TIMING

The lesson we've learned about the right channels and message is that accounting firms should keep things simple. Connect with people through well-established channels with offers that meet the needs and desires of every taxpayer.

In the channels section, we mentioned that taxpayers want to hear from accounting firms in advance of tax season. The conversation about taxes too often begins too late.

Our survey reveals that most people start thinking about filing taxes in February. That's only two and a half months before the typical deadline! In fact, many taxpayers consider January too early to even think about filing their income taxes.

The recent change to the income tax deadline gives both accounting firms and their clients more time to prepare taxes. Our survey shows that, at the very least, taxpayers understand that starting to deal with their taxes in April is too late. Not this year!

And it's a good thing, too. Procrastination is often the name of the game for taxpayers. 34% of them admit to procrastinating preparation of their tax returns.

We found that people procrastinate their tax preparation



with greater frequency than they do developing a budget, getting a physical, making New Year's resolutions, improving their sleep schedule, saving money, planning for retirement, and taking a vacation.

That's right. While filing taxes is one of the most essential annual activities that we perform as citizens, many of us put it off as long as we can. It's almost like taxes are torture.

16% of people would rather assemble IKEA furniture than prepare taxes. 12% would rather listen to a timeshare sales pitch than prepare their taxes. 11% of taxpayers would choose to change a diaper before dealing with their taxes.

Depicting the aversion customers have to preparing taxes isn't meant to discourage accounting firms. If anything, they should be encouraged by the realization that people don't want to handle taxes; they want someone else to take care of them.

Taxes are inescapable. Even with an extended deadline, your clients need assistance in not procrastinating tax preparation. We want to encourage your firm not to procrastinate reaching out to current and prospective customers about filing their 2020 tax returns.

Taxpayers know what they need to do. Contact them through the right channels with the right message and help them get their taxes done on time.

## HOOKS AND SURPRISES

In addition to the important statistics and preferences we discovered in our survey about the right channels, messaging, and timing for communicating with clients during the 2020 tax season, we also want to share some fun facts gathered from taxpayers.

Some of these numbers may surprise accountants,

while others may confirm long-held opinions and beliefs about the emotions evoked in consumers by tax season.

The taxpayers in our survey most commonly experienced feelings of accomplishment, frustration, and satisfaction while working on their taxes.

On the other hand, they rarely experienced feelings of desperation, rebellion, and anger.

Good marketing strategies take these shared emotions into consideration. Accounting firms that recognize how tax season induces both frustration and satisfaction in taxpayers have an advantage in constructing messages that channel these emotions.

To be more specific, 31% of taxpayers experience frustration while preparing their taxes. 23% of them are worried about their tax preparation. And 9% of the taxpayers we surveyed said they had nightmares about having their taxes audited.

Cultivating a message that promises reduced frustration and a sense of accomplishment to taxpayers is another way to get clients through your door.

Returning to effective offers, it's clear from our data that taxpayers want protection from an IRS audit. Your accounting firm should establish itself as a protector of its clients, taking accountability for potential IRS audits.

Why? Because people are afraid of audits. Here are some things taxpayers would rather do than be audited by the IRS:



- 19% would rather give a 60-minute speech on a topic they know nothing about
- 15% would rather go skydiving
- 14% would rather spend the night alone in a scary, abandoned house
- 11% would rather be stuck in an elevator for the entire weekend

## INDEPENDENT STUDY REVIEW

To review, the independent study we commissioned shows that communication channels, messaging, and timing all matter for this upcoming tax season.

Taxpayers want to hear from your accounting firm in advance, by traditional mail, electronic mail or in person.

Your message is best received when it focuses on items like hidden deductions, health insurance, and other investments. Taxpayers like offers such as guaranteed accuracy, discount prices, and audit protection.

Lastly, taxpayers tend to delay their tax preparation. This extended tax season is an opportunity to help them avoid unnecessary stress.

## THE RIGHT COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

As an extension of our study of taxpayer preferences, we want to show you some of the ways Weave helps accounting firms communicate with their clients through the right channels, with the right message, at the right time.

The discussion here will be somewhat brief, serving as supplemental material to the previous section. We hope

for you to first grasp how to communicate with customers during this unique tax season, then provide you with the tools to manage that communication.

## TWO-WAY TEXTING

Weave offers businesses the ability to utilize texting as a fundamental component of communication. While texting isn't the ideal channel for sharing tax tips, it's a great way to notify customers about upcoming emails, flyers, and in-person workshops. If clients already have appointments set up with your firm, reminders and confirmations via text are important to ensure they don't forget about scheduled meetings.

Your text messages can be customized using Weave. This customizability means your firm has the power to keep clients in the loop regarding tax season discounts, as well as guaranteed accuracy and audit protection. Plus, texting is a convenient way to let customers know about extensions and complications resulting from COVID-19.

Right now is the time to engage customers by text. Many of them have been procrastinating, and finding out about the extended deadline will come as a relief. They will be happy to know their accountant is up to date regarding the present health crisis and interested in the essential services you're offering over the extended deadline window.

## TEXT TO PAY

Our developers recently added Weave Payments to our product line. Among other features, this software includes Text to Pay, which enables customers to pay your firm by text message rather than by traditional payment methods. With Weave Payments on board, your firm has the ability to charge for services without risking infection of clients or employees.

Text to Pay sends the message to customers that their health matters to your firm. Many people right now are hesitant to visit businesses, even for the most essential of services, like filing taxes. Letting them know that your accounting office is taking steps to protect them from the current pandemic is another way to build credibility.

Since Weave Payments is a relatively new feature, we encourage you to make customers aware of this payment option now. It's likely that coronavirus will leave consumers skittish about frequenting even the most trusted businesses well into the near future. Save undue paranoia by showing your team and clientele how to maintain proper social distancing with Text to Pay.

## TEAM CHAT

With some accounting firms already asking members of their staff to work remotely, it's vital that they have effective channels of communication with each other. Our Team Chat feature keeps the lines of communication open between members of your team. Texting with each other to stay informed about special promotions and tax tips is just as important as communicating with customers.

As clients inquire about upcoming promotions and

the deadline extension, your team can keep each other in the loop to unify messaging. Whether they're discussing tax tips, scheduling, or service guarantees with customers, accountancy firm staff need to be on the same page. Team Chat lets them do just that, despite the constraints imposed by COVID-19.

It's important that your team has all the tools it needs right now in order to be appropriately prepared for the tax deadline extension. If they're communicating well in the middle of our present situation, imagine how easy things will be once some of the current limitations are lifted.

## REVIEWS

While the taxpayers in our survey didn't want to get tips online, there's no doubt consumers rely on review sites like Google, Facebook, and Yelp before making financial decisions. 84% of people trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation. So, having positive reviews is a crucial channel for getting new clients as the July 15 deadline approaches.

Good reviews send a message about your accounting firm to potential customers. As your team notifies clients about upcoming promotions and quality assurance by mail and by word-of-mouth, they should simultaneously be requesting reviews from satisfied customers. They can do this remotely by text, another great way to accommodate social distancing.

Modern marketing strategies rely on consumer reviews in all seasons. In the buildup to this unique tax season, your accounting firm can bolster its prominence on review sites by gathering reviews. Showing resiliency and management in difficult situations like the present one lets clients know that your firm is ready to guide its clients through any crisis.

## EMAIL MARKETING

One of the main findings from our survey is how important email can be as a channel for accounting firms. At Weave, we have designed a new mass email tool meant to standardize, customize, and personalize your firm's email marketing. Since the majority of the taxpayers we surveyed want to get tax tips from accountants by email, it's imperative that firms make this communication possible with the appropriate tools.

The idea behind our email marketing tool is for your firm to get the right message out to current and potential customers. Especially in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, clients want to be informed about how events in the news affect the essential businesses and services they need. Additionally, email is a crucial way to let people know about the promotions, guarantees, and protections your firm is providing during the 2020 tax season.

Right now is the time to get up and running with Weave's email marketing tool. With the filing deadline extended, your accounting firm has the chance to reach customers that have procrastinated their taxes and to find new clients. Email is a fundamental part of expanding your firm's marketing efforts.

## PREPARING FOR THE 2020 TAX SEASON

This tax season promises to be an unprecedented one. COVID-19 has changed the schedules and routines of every industry, and accounting firms are no exception.

Extending the income tax filing deadline to July 15 is a significant change for accountants. It's also an opportunity to support unprepared clients and to reach new customers.

The recent survey conducted shows that right now is the time to start contacting taxpayers about this season and its extended deadline. Many taxpayers experience negative feelings that lead to procrastination. Contacting them with tax tips by traditional and electronic mail, as well as in-person, is a great way to begin reaching out.

Make sure that your tax tips are focused on hidden deductions, health insurance clarifications, and other investments that could be written off. Offer your customers an accuracy guarantee, discounts for coming in early, and audit protection. Our statistics show that these messages appeal broadly to taxpayers.

Finally, Weave's communication system is an additional asset for this unique tax season. Its features allow your accounting firm to accommodate employees working remotely, clients mindful of social distancing, and owners navigating daily updates to policy.

With the right marketing strategy and communication tools, your accounting firm will be ready to serve its customers, both old and new, throughout the 2020 tax season.





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